

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS  
BROWNSVILLE DIVISION

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS  
FILED

APR 15 2021

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

v.

JOEL ALEX SANDATE,  
Defendant

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§

CRIMINAL NO. B-21-348

NATHAN OCHSNER  
CLERK OF COURT

**PLEA AGREEMENT**

The United States of America, by and through Jennifer B. Lowery, Acting United States Attorney for the Southern District of Texas, and Ana C. Cano, Assistant United States Attorney, and the defendant, JOEL ALEX SANDATE ("Defendant"), and Defendant's counsel, Ed Stapleton, pursuant to **Rule 11(c)(1)(C)** of the Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure, state that they have entered into an agreement, the terms and conditions of which are as follows:

**Defendant's Agreement**

1. Defendant agrees to plead guilty to a Criminal Information. The Criminal Information charges Defendant with **Possession of Child Pornography**, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 2252A(a)(5)(B) and 2252A(b)(2). Defendant, by entering this plea, agrees that he is waiving any right to have the facts that the law makes essential to the punishment either charged in the Criminal Information or indictment, or proved to a jury or proven beyond a reasonable doubt.

**Punishment Range**

2. The statutory maximum penalty for a violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 2252A(a)(5)(B) and 2252A(b)(2), is imprisonment for up to 10 years and a fine of not more than \$250,000.00. With a conviction for Possession of Child Pornography, there

is mandatory restitution under Title 18, United States Code, Section 2259 which is not less than \$3,000.00 per victim. Additionally, Defendant may receive a term of supervised release after imprisonment of at least 5 years to life. See Title 18, United States Code, sections Section 3583(k). Defendant acknowledges and understands that if he should violate the conditions of any period of supervised release which may be imposed as part of his sentence, then Defendant may be imprisoned for the entire term of supervised release, without credit for time already served on the term of supervised release prior to such violation. See Title 18, United States Code, sections 3559(a)(3) and 3583(k). Defendant understands that he cannot have the imposition or execution of the sentence suspended, nor is he eligible for parole.

#### **Mandatory Special Assessment**

3. Pursuant to Title 18, United States Code, section 3013(a)(2)(A), immediately after sentencing, Defendant will pay to the Clerk of the United States District Court a special assessment in the amount of one hundred dollars (\$100.00) per count of conviction. The payment will be by cashier's check or money order, payable to the Clerk of the United States District Court, c/o District Clerk's Office, P.O. Box 61010, Houston, Texas 77208, Attention: Finance.

4. Pursuant to Title 18, United States Code, Section 3014(a)(3), the court determines that the Defendant is a non-indigent person, the Defendant will pay to the Clerk of the United States District Court a special assessment in the amount of five thousand dollars (\$5000.00) per count of conviction. The payment will be by cashier's check or money order, payable to the Clerk of the United States District Court, c/o District clerk's Office,

P.O. Box 61010, Houston, TX 77208, Attention: Finance.

5. Pursuant to Title 18, United States Code, Section 2259A, in addition to any other criminal penalty, restitution, or special assessment authorized by law, the Court shall assess no more than:

(1) \$17,000.00 if the Defendant is convicted of 18 U.S.C. §2252(a)(4) or §2252A(a)(5);

(2) \$35,000.00 if the Defendant is convicted of any other trafficking in child pornography offenses as defined by §2259(c)(3), which includes offenses under 18 U.S.C. §§2251 (d), 2252(a)(1) through (3), 2252A(a)(1) through (4), 2252A(g) (in cases in which the series of felony violations exclusively involves violations of sections 2251(d), 2252, 2252A(a)(1) through (5), or 2260(b)), or 2260(b);

(3) \$50,000.00 if the Defendant is convicted of child pornography production as defined by 18 U.S.C. §2259(c)(1), which includes offenses under 18 U.S.C. §2251(a) through (c), 2251A, 2252A(g) (in chase in which the series of felony violations involves at least 1 of the violations listed in this subsection), 2260(a) or any offense under chapter 109A or chapter 117 that involved the production of child pornography. The payment will be by cashier's check or money order, payable to the Clerk of the United States District Court, c/o District clerk's Office, P.O. Box 61010, Houston, TX 77208, Attention: Finance.

### **Immigration Consequences**

6. Defendant recognizes that pleading guilty may have consequences with respect to his immigration status if he is not a citizen of the United States. Defendant understands

that if he is not a citizen of the United States, by pleading guilty he may be removed from the United States, denied citizenship, and denied admission to the United States in the future. Defendant's attorney has advised Defendant of the potential immigration consequences resulting from Defendant's plea of guilty.

#### **Waiver of Appeal and Collateral Review**

7. Defendant is aware that Title 28, United States Code, section 1291, and Title 18, United States Code, section 3742, afford a defendant the right to appeal the conviction and sentence imposed. Defendant is also aware that Title 28, United States Code, section 2255, affords the right to contest or "collaterally attack" a conviction or sentence after the judgment of conviction and sentence has become final. Defendant knowingly and voluntarily waives the right to appeal or "collaterally attack" the conviction and sentence, except that Defendant does not waive the right to raise a claim of ineffective assistance of counsel on direct appeal, if otherwise permitted, or on collateral review in a motion under Title 28, United States Code, section 2255. In the event Defendant files a notice of appeal following the imposition of the sentence or later collaterally attacks his conviction or sentence, the United States will assert its rights under this agreement and seek specific performance of these waivers.

8. In agreeing to these waivers, Defendant is aware that a sentence has not yet been determined by the Court. Defendant is also aware that any estimate of the possible sentencing range under the sentencing guidelines that he may have received from his counsel, the United States or the Probation Office, is a prediction and not a promise, did not induce his/her guilty plea, and is not binding on the United States, the Probation Office

or the Court. The United States does not make any promise or representation concerning what sentence the defendant will receive. Defendant further understands and agrees that the United States Sentencing Guidelines are “effectively advisory” to the Court. See *United States v. Booker*, 543 U.S. 220 (2005). Accordingly, Defendant understands that, although the Court must consult the Sentencing Guidelines and must take them into account when sentencing Defendant, the Court is not bound to follow the Sentencing Guidelines nor sentence Defendant within the calculated guideline range.

9. Defendant understands and agrees that each and all waivers contained in the Agreement are made in exchange for the concessions made by the United States in this plea agreement.

#### **The United States' Agreements**

10. The United States agrees to each of the following:

- (a) If Defendant pleads guilty to the Criminal Information and persists in that plea through sentencing, and if the Court accepts this plea agreement, the United States will move to dismiss the indictment in B-20-336 at the time of sentencing;
- (b) Additionally, the United States will recommend a sentence of 120 months imprisonment in exchange for defendant's plea to the Criminal Information;
- (c) Finally, the United States will recommend a period of lifetime supervision and sex offender registration.

#### **Agreement Binding - Southern District of Texas Only**

11. The United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Texas agrees that it will not further criminally prosecute Defendant in the Southern District of Texas for offenses arising from conduct charged in the indictment. This plea agreement binds only

the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Texas and Defendant. It does not bind any other United States Attorney's Office. The United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Texas will bring this plea agreement and the full extent of Defendant's cooperation to the attention of other prosecuting offices, if requested.

#### **United States' Non-Waiver of Appeal**

12. The United States reserves the right to carry out its responsibilities under guidelines sentencing. Specifically, the United States reserves the right:

- (a) to bring its version of the facts of this case, including its evidence file and any investigative files, to the attention of the Probation Office in connection with that office's preparation of a presentence report;
- (b) to set forth or dispute sentencing factors or facts material to sentencing;
- (c) to seek resolution of such factors or facts in conference with Defendant's counsel and the Probation Office;
- (d) to file a pleading relating to these issues, in accordance with section 6A1.2 of the United States Sentencing Guidelines and Title 18, United States Code, section 3553(a); and
- (e) to appeal the sentence imposed or the manner in which it was determined.

#### **Sentence Determination**

13. Defendant is aware that the sentence will be imposed after consideration of the United States Sentencing Guidelines and Policy Statements, which are only advisory, as well as the provisions of Title 18, United States Code, Section 3553(a). Defendant nonetheless acknowledges and agrees that the Court has authority to impose any sentence up to and including the statutory maximum set for the offense(s) to which

Defendant pleads guilty, and that the sentence to be imposed is within the sole discretion of the sentencing judge after the Court has consulted the applicable Sentencing Guidelines. Defendant understands and agrees that the parties' positions regarding the application of the Sentencing Guidelines do not bind the Court and that the sentence imposed is within the discretion of the sentencing judge. If the Court should impose any sentence up to the maximum established by statute, or should the Court order any or all of the sentences imposed to run consecutively, Defendant cannot, for that reason alone, withdraw a guilty plea, and will remain bound to fulfill all of the obligations under this plea agreement.

#### **Rights at Trial**

14. Defendant understands that by entering into this agreement, he surrenders certain rights as provided in this plea agreement. Defendant understands that the rights of a defendant include the following:

- (a) If Defendant persisted in a plea of not guilty to the charges, defendant would have the right to a speedy jury trial with the assistance of counsel. The trial may be conducted by a judge sitting without a jury if Defendant, the United States, and the court all agree.
- (b) At a trial, the United States would be required to present witnesses and other evidence against Defendant. Defendant would have the opportunity to confront those witnesses and his attorney would be allowed to cross-examine them. In turn, Defendant could, but would not be required to, present witnesses and other evidence on his own behalf. If the witnesses for Defendant would not appear voluntarily, he could require their attendance through the subpoena power of the court; and
- (c) At a trial, Defendant could rely on a privilege against self-incrimination and decline to testify, and no inference of guilt could be drawn from such refusal to testify. However, if Defendant desired to do so, he could testify on his own behalf.

### **Factual Basis for Guilty Plea**

15. Defendant is pleading guilty because he is in fact guilty of the charges contained in the Criminal Information. If this case were to proceed to trial, the United States could prove each element of the offenses of possession of child pornography beyond a reasonable doubt. The following facts, among others would be offered to establish the Defendant's guilt:

a. On or about March 18, 2020, an officer with Primera Police Department discovered an ADATA Micro SD card on the floor of the Police locker room. The officer used a card reader to view the videos of the ADATA Micro SD Card and viewed what appeared to a be a minor female in a bedroom in various states of undress. The officer then saw a video of what looked like fellow police officer JOEL ALEX SANDATE looking into the lens of the camera and adjusting the angle of the camera after looking back and forth to his phone and the camera lens. Officer Lopez reported the contents of the ADATA Micro SD Card to Special Investigations Unit with Cameron County District Attorney's Office who then obtained an arrest warrant for JOEL ALEX SANDATE and a residential search warrant for Sandate's home. Defendant was arrested that same evening and his cell phone was seized. During the search of the defendant's home law enforcement officers located two Fredi cameras hidden behind the vanity of the minor female's bedroom. Additionally, officers discovered two additional Fredi cameras in the defendant's red Ford pick up truck. The Fredi cameras in the pick up were identical to the



ones discovered inside the bedroom. Additionally, agents with Homeland Security Investigations analyzed the images and videos contained within the ADATA Micro SD card and the defendant's Samsung S+9 cell phone and discovered images of child pornography in both. The creation dates of the videos ranged between on or about September of 2019 to on or about March of 2020. Some of the videos on the defendant's cell phone matched the videos on the ADATA Micro SD card. Many of the videos contained in the ADATA Micro SD Card and the Samsung S+9 cell phone depicted a minor female (age 14) in various states of undress. The videos met the statutory definition of child pornography pursuant to Title 18 USC Section 2256(8)(A).

b. The defendant admits that he possessed images and video containing child pornography on the ADATA Micro SD Card, the Lexar 4 GB USB and his Samsung S+9 cell phone. Additionally, the defendant admits to installing two Fredi cameras to the vanity in the minor victim's bedroom.

c. The Defendant's ADATA Micro SD Card, Lexar 4GB USB and Samsung S+9 cell phone were manufactured outside of the state of Texas. Consequently, the computer media at issue which was used to possess the child pornography traveled in foreign or interstate commerce. Further, the Defendant utilized the Internet which is a means and facility of interstate commerce to possess the child pornography which was found on the above referenced media devices.

#### **Breach of Plea Agreement**

16. If Defendant should fail in any way to fulfill completely all of the obligations under this plea agreement, the United States will be released from its obligations under

the plea agreement, and Defendant's plea and sentence will stand. If at any time Defendant retains, conceals, or disposes of assets in violation of this plea agreement, or if Defendant knowingly withholds evidence or is otherwise not completely truthful with the United States, then the United States may move the Court to set aside the guilty plea and reinstate prosecution. Any information and documents that have been disclosed by Defendant, whether prior to or subsequent to this plea agreement, and all leads derived therefrom, will be used against defendant in any prosecution.

**Restitution, Forfeiture, and Fines – Generally**

17. This Plea Agreement is being entered into by the United States on the basis of Defendant's express representation that he will make a full and complete disclosure of all assets over which he exercises direct or indirect control, or in which he has any financial interest. Defendant agrees not to dispose of any assets or take any action that would effect a transfer of property in which he has an interest, unless Defendant obtains the prior written permission of the United States.

18. Defendant agrees to make complete financial disclosure by truthfully executing a sworn financial statement (Form OBD-500 or similar form) within 14 days of signing this plea agreement. Defendant agrees to authorize the release of all financial information requested by the United States, including, but not limited to, executing authorization forms permitting the United States to obtain tax information, bank account records, credit histories, and social security information. Defendant agrees to discuss and answer any questions by the United States relating to Defendant's complete financial disclosure.

19. Defendant agrees to take all steps necessary to pass clear title to forfeitable assets to the United States and to assist fully in the collection of restitution and fines,

including, but not limited to, surrendering title, executing a warranty deed, signing a consent decree, stipulating to facts regarding the transfer of title and the basis for the forfeiture, and signing any other documents necessary to effectuate such transfer. Defendant also agrees to direct any banks which have custody of his/her assets to deliver all funds and records of such assets to the United States.

20. Defendant understands that forfeiture, restitution, and fines are separate components of sentencing and are separate obligations.

#### **Restitution**

21. Defendant agrees to pay full restitution to the victim(s) regardless of the count(s) of conviction. Defendant stipulates and agrees that as a result of his criminal conduct, the victim(s) incurred a monetary loss in an amount to be determined either before sentencing or within 90 days of the sentencing hearing. Defendant understands and agrees that the Court will determine the amount of restitution to fully compensate the victim(s) pursuant to Title 18, United States Code, Section 2259(b)(2). Defendant understands that the amount is to be no less than \$3,000.00 per victim. Defendant agrees that restitution imposed by the Court will be due and payable immediately and that Defendant will not attempt to avoid or delay payment. Subject to the provisions of paragraph 7 above, Defendant waives the right to challenge in any manner, including by direct appeal or in a collateral proceeding, the restitution order imposed by the Court.

#### **Forfeiture**

22. Defendant stipulates and agrees that the property listed in the Indictment's Notice of Forfeiture (and in any supplemental Notices) is subject to forfeiture, and

Defendant agrees to the forfeiture of that property. In particular, but without limitation, Defendant stipulates that the following specific property is subject to forfeiture:

a Samsung S+9 cell phone

Four (4) Fredi Cameras

An ADATA Micro SD Card

One Lexar 4 GB USB

23. Defendant agrees to waive any and all interest in any asset which is the subject of a related administrative or judicial forfeiture proceeding, whether criminal or civil, federal or state.

24. Defendant consents to the order of forfeiture becoming final as to Defendant immediately following this guilty plea, pursuant to Federal Rule of Criminal Procedure 32.2(b)(4)(A).

25. Subject to the provisions of paragraph 7 above, Defendant waives the right to challenge the forfeiture of property in any manner, including by direct appeal or in a collateral proceeding.

### **Fines**

26. Defendant understands that under the Sentencing Guidelines the Court is permitted to order Defendant to pay a fine that is sufficient to reimburse the government for the costs of any imprisonment or term of supervised release, if any. Defendant agrees that any fine imposed by the Court will be due and payable immediately, and Defendant will not attempt to avoid or delay payment. Subject to the provisions of paragraph 7

above, Defendant waives the right to challenge the fine in any manner, including by direct appeal or in a collateral proceeding.

**Notification of the Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act**

27. Defendant has been advised, and understands, that under the Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act, a federal law, he must register and keep the registration current in each of the following jurisdictions: where he resides; where he is an employee; and where he is a student. The Defendant understands that the requirements for registration include providing his name, his residence address and the names and addresses of any places where he is or will be an employee or a student, among other information. The Defendant further understands that the requirement to keep the registration current includes informing at least one jurisdiction in which he resides, is an employee, or is a student not later than three (3) business days after any change of residence, employment, or student status. Defendant has been advised, and understands, that failure to comply with these obligations subjects him to prosecution for failure to register under federal law, 18 U.S.C. §2250, which is punishable by a fine or imprisonment, or both.

### Complete Agreement

28. This written plea agreement, consisting of 15 pages, including the attached addendum of Defendant and his attorney, constitutes the complete plea agreement between the United States, Defendant, and Defendant's counsel. No promises or representations have been made by the United States except as set forth in writing in this plea agreement. Defendant acknowledges that no threats have been made against him and that he is pleading guilty freely and voluntarily because he is guilty.

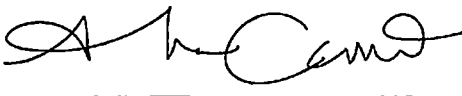
29. Any modification of this plea agreement must be in writing and signed by all parties.

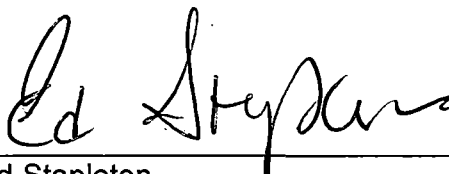
Filed at Brownsville, Texas, on April 15, 2021.

  
Defendant Joel Alex Sandate

APPROVED:

JENNIFER B. LOWERY  
United States Attorney

By:   
ANA C. CANO  
Assistant United States Attorney  
Southern District of Texas

  
Ed Stapleton  
Attorney for Defendant

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS  
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CRIMINAL NO. B-21-348

PLEA AGREEMENT -- ADDENDUM

*cc*  
*information*  
I have fully explained to Defendant his/her rights with respect to the pending indictment. I have reviewed the provisions of the United States Sentencing Commission's Guidelines Manual and Policy Statements and I have fully and carefully explained to Defendant the provisions of those Guidelines which may apply in this case. I have also explained to Defendant that the Sentencing Guidelines are only advisory and the court may sentence Defendant up to the maximum allowed by statute per count of conviction. Further, I have carefully reviewed every part of this plea agreement with Defendant. To my knowledge, Defendant's decision to enter into this agreement is an informed and voluntary one. *(Along with alex Galloway)*

*[Signature]*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Attorney for Defendant

*April 15, 2021*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*cc*  
*information*  
I have consulted with my attorney and fully understand all my rights with respect to the indictment pending against me. My attorney has fully explained, and I understand, all my rights with respect to the provisions of the United States Sentencing Commission's Guidelines Manual which may apply in my case. I have read and carefully reviewed every part of this plea agreement with my attorney. I understand this agreement and I voluntarily agree to its terms.

*x [Signature]*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Defendant

*4-15-21*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date